

JOHN & JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (WEST PARCEL),
BUILDING NO. 3

Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5383-C

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PA
51-PHILA,
695C-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
JOHN AND JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (West Parcel), BUILDING 3
HABS No. PA-5383-C

Location:

4041-4055 Ridge Avenue
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

Present Owner:

Rouse Urban Housing, Inc.
1500 Walnut Street, 19th Floor
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102

Present Occupant:

Boiler house and vacant.

Significance:

Building 3 is significant as the primary boiler house at the Dobsons' mill during the second half of the period of production at the mill. The central boiler serviced a perimeter pipe, continuous flow, steam heat system throughout the site.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

Date(s) of Erection:

An original boiler house was located in this area as early as 1873. Refer to the Original Plans/Construction/Alterations below for the construction sequence.

Architect:

Unknown.

Original/Subsequent Owners:

See Chain of Title.

Builder/Contractor/Suppliers:

Unknown.

Original Plans/Construction/Alterations:

Building 3's construction sequence is difficult to document exactly as the building grew out of additions and infills to the structures surrounding it. As early as 1873, a Hexamer Survey documents that a boiler house was located in this area of the complex, as part of Building 4. By 1885, a rectangular structure was added on to the east elevation of Building 4 that exclusively housed a boiler room. The boilers inside Building 4 also appeared operative at this time. Views of the site from this period show four smokestacks including one of 135' located in close proximity to the boiler houses. By 1894 the structures housing the boilers had expanded with a wool sorting room and the 135' smokestack was incorporated into the east elevation of this room. A Smith Atlas from 1912 indicates that by this time the wool sorting room had expanded to the east, possibly with boiler house facilities. This structure was expanded by 1914 and again by 1919. The atlases indicate that the boilers were definitely housed in these structures at this time. The atlases also show that the round brick chimney had replaced the square smoke stack shown in earlier views by this time. Again by 1922, the structure was enlarged. It appears that at this time the building housed four boilers. Sometime after 1925, the wool sorting room that had been an infill between the boiler house, Building 4, and the blacksmith shop that was located at the eastern end of Building 5 were demolished, opening up the courtyard that is now formed by Buildings 3 and 4. The buildings that remain as Building 3 were constructed as two-story rubblestone structures. The smokestack was constructed of brick. Circa 1930, a concrete tower was added to the east elevation of the building. Building 3's

fenestration has undergone extensive alterations in the mid-twentieth century. Almost all of the openings have been infilled and/or altered from their original configurations.

B. Historical Context

Building 3 began as a boiler house in the early 1870s. From this time until the late nineteenth century the boilers housed in this building most likely served only the buildings of the Brussels Carpet Mill. Late-nineteenth-century views show smokestacks located throughout the site indicating buildings had their own boiler rooms. By the early twentieth century, however, Building 3 had become the principal boiler house for the entire complex. The boiler house documents the modernization of energy and heat sources and the subsequent ability to house mechanical systems for an entire complex in a single building.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

Architectural Character:

The boiler house, though constructed incrementally, retains the character of the other structures at the site with randomly laid rubble walls and brick segmentally arched windows. The smokestack differs in its brick construction and distinguishes it as an early-twentieth-century construction.

Condition of Fabric:

The masonry is in fair condition; recent fill has caused the west elevation to deflect resulting in localized structural failure.

B. Description of Exterior

Foundations:

Rubblestone.

Walls:

North elevation- three angled one-story sections of rubble masonry capped by a simple brick cornice with terra cotta coping. East elevation- two sections, comprised of the north section which has a projecting circa 1930 concrete tower; the south has two sections, to the west is a two-story section of rubble masonry capped with a brick corbeled cornice and

terra cotta coping, to the east the wall angles and retains its earlier barn dash mortar. West elevation- two-story rubble masonry capped with a simple brick corbeled cornice and terra cotta coping, the first story is obscured by modern infill.

Structural System/Framing:

Masonry construction with timber framing and later steel framing and reinforcements.

Porches/Stoops/Balconies/Bulkheads:

None.

Chimneys:

Truncated brick chimney rising from roof. Yellow brick with "_OBSON" spelled out vertically in red brick.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

North elevation- none; east elevation- first floor infilled opening to the south, to the north, infilled opening beneath multi-light transom and modern single leaf door, door into concrete tower; south elevation- gated entry into boiler room, infilled opening beneath steel headed lintel; west elevation- none.

Windows/Shutters:

North elevation- one infilled window opening. East elevation- three large vertical openings beneath brick segmentally arched windows, one completely infilled, two partially infilled, headed by steel lintel and lit with industrial steel sash. Also, originally three openings beneath soldier course brick lintels now altered to doors and infilled with cinder block. South elevation- industrial steel window, deteriorated, all other openings retain their brick segmentally arched lintels but have been infilled. West elevation- four segmentally arched openings, now infilled. All of the original openings had brick row lock sills.

Roof:

The roof is flat and covered with a built-up asphalt roof. It is not visible due to a parapet. Rising out of roof is a truncated brick chimney. Above the concrete addition is a roof mounted steel compressor unit.

C. Description of Interior

Floor Plans:

Utilitarian space without interior partitioning divided into two large spaces that originally functioned as boiler room and machine shop; catwalk, hung on steel framing. A natural stone outcropping is located in the northeastern corner of building. The southern section contains the boiler and related equipment.

Stairways:

Metal industrial catwalks in both sections of the building.

Flooring:

Concrete floor, there is an outcropping of bedrock in the northern end of the building.

Wall/Ceiling Finishes:

Walls are of rubble with a stucco coating, ceilings are exposed timber and plank.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

No surviving original or historic interior doors.

Windows:

All windows recessed in unornamented plaster.

Decorative Features and Trim:

N/A.

Hardware:

Impossible to determine original hardware.

Mechanical Equipment:

Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: The perimeter pipe, continuous flow, steam heat system, heating the entire site was powered by the boilers located in this building.

Ventilation was by the various smoke stacks attached to the building during the Dobsons' tenure. Air conditioning is N/A.

Lighting: N/A.

Plumbing: N/A.

D. Site

General Setting/Orientation:

Building 3 is located to the rear of the large "U" shape of buildings that were part of the Brussels Carpet Mill in the center of the west parcel. Its utilitarian function is expressed in its obscure location, wedged between other structures. The building sits on a slope to the north, resulting in bedrock in the northern interior of the structure. The boiler room is accessed from the south.

Historic Landscape Design:

See Historic Context Section.

Outbuildings:

N/A.